



JIMMY FIRST

AND THE TIME CONFLICT

Ian O'Neill

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By

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Chapter One - An Unexpected Visitor

‘I’m really going to miss you.’

‘It’s not the other side of the Universe, Chlo. I’ll only be in South London. It takes a couple of hours by train and tube, that’s all.’

Jimmy sat on his bed as Chloe packed his clothes into a suitcase.

‘But you’re just down the road now – we can see each other any time we like.’

‘I’ll try and get home every month and you can come and stay in the flat with me. It will be great – honest.’

‘And what about all those pretty art students. You’ll forget all about me.’

Jimmy took hold of Chloe’s hand and gave it an affectionate squeeze.

‘Why would I want to settle for second best when I’ve got you?’

Chloe sat down on the bed next to him and kissed him on his cheek.

‘You’ve been hanging around with Danny too long. You’re even starting to use his cheesy lines now!’

They leant back against his pillow and he put his arm around her.

‘You do want me to go to college, don’t you?’

Chloe sat up and looked directly into his eyes.

‘Of course I do. I’m so proud that my boyfriend is going to Art College in London, but...’

‘It’s only four years, Chlo. I’ll be back before you know it.’

‘You will e-mail me every day – and ring and text?’

‘You’ll be fed up of me annoying you all of the time,’ and kissed her full on her lips. Chloe leant back and rested her head on Jimmy’s shoulder.

‘Do you have to go out with Danny and the boys tonight?’

‘They’re my best mates, Chlo. We’re only going for a few drinks in town.’

‘Just like the last time they took you out for a few drinks on your eighteenth birthday – it took you two days to get over it.’

‘We were drinking shots, Chlo. It got a bit out of hand. It’s going to be much quieter tonight – I promise. Besides, I’m going to be living the life of a poor student soon so I’m not going to have much spare cash.’

‘Just remember that we’re going out to the Italian in town tomorrow night for our farewell meal. I don’t want you looking like death because of Danny Shorman forcing tequila slammers down you.’

Just at that moment Jimmy’s mobile phone rang. He picked it up off the bedside cabinet and looked at the number.

‘It’s Henry – he never rings me on my mobile. I wonder what he wants.’

‘Why don’t you try answering it and find out,’ smiled Zoe.

Jimmy pressed the green button and held the phone up to his ear.

‘Hi Henry.’

‘Young Jimmy, how are you this fine evening?’

‘I’m just packing my case ready for Monday.’

‘You mean you’ve got that lovely young girl doing it for you!’

‘Yes,’ laughed Jimmy.

‘I’m sorry to bother you so late,’ said Henry. ‘I was wondering if you could pop into the shop.’

‘I’m a bit tight on time. I’m due to meet my mates in town at nine.’

‘Perhaps you could call in to see me on the way,’ suggested Henry.

Jimmy looked at his watch; it was just after eight. He could do it if he had a quick shower rather than his usual twenty minute routine and still make it to the pub for nine.

‘OK,’ said Jimmy, ‘I’ll see you at around half-eight.’

Jimmy put his phone back on the bedside table.

‘What did he want?’ asked Chloe.

Jimmy shrugged his shoulders. ‘He wants me to call into the shop – he didn’t say why.’

‘If I know Henry, he’ll want to give you something special to take to Art College. I wonder what it is ...?’

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Sadness tinged Jimmy’s upbeat mood as he walked down the Mews towards Henry’s shop. He remembered a Saturday morning four years previously when an anxious fourteen year old stood apprehensively looking at an old run down shop wondering what his mother had got him into. What he hadn’t realised at the time was that it was a life changing moment. He’d had four wonderful years working with Henry Crumble, and now it was coming to an end.

He opened the door and the brass bell above his head jingled his entrance. Henry appeared at the doorway to his workshop.

‘Young Jimmy, thank you for calling in at such short notice. Please, come into the workshop. I have a pot of Earl Grey brewing.’

‘It’s OK,’ said Jimmy. ‘I don’t really have the time.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Henry. ‘There’s always time for Earl Grey.’

Jimmy followed Henry into the workshop and was surprised to see a middle-aged man sitting behind the workbench. He was dressed in a casual open-necked

white shirt and cream slacks. His white hair was cut short and a neatly trimmed white beard covered a chiselled face. He had a presence and an aura unlike anyone he had ever met before. Jimmy instinctively knew who he was.

The man stood up and held out his hand. 'Jimmy First – we meet at long last.'

Jimmy took hold of his hand and shook it.

'I am Auron. Please, don't stand on ceremony, take a seat.'

Jimmy sat down at the bench as Henry placed a mug of Earl Grey in front of him. His old friend had surprised him once again. Why would Auron be sharing a mug of Earl Grey with Henry in his workshop? And why would Henry want Jimmy to join them?

Auron thoughtfully sipped his tea as Henry pulled up a chair and sat next to him. Jimmy watched in awe as the most powerful individual in the Universe sat in the midst of the chaos that was Henry Crumble's workshop, drinking Earl Grey tea from a chipped mug. *It doesn't get any more surreal than this*, he thought.

'No doubt you're wondering why after four Earth years have passed that I would suddenly turn up in Henry's workshop to meet you?'

The thought had crossed my mind.

'I have wanted to meet you for a long time now but our mutual friend, one Henry Crumble, felt that you needed to focus on your studies. And as usual, Henry was right. I understand that congratulations are in order.'

Jimmy was struggling to ground himself. His night was meant to be a few beers with his mates in the Bell and a takeaway on the way home. Sharing a mug of tea with the Head of the Time Council wasn't on the agenda.

'I'm told that Kingston is a very prestigious Art College. I want you to know that the Time Guardians are very proud of you.'

‘Thanks,’ mumbled Jimmy. He picked up his mug with a trembling hand and sipped his tea. He needed the Earl Grey to work its magic. He needed it to calm him.

‘I particularly enjoyed your exhibition at the Library in Leighton Buzzard,’ continued Auron. ‘The anti drug theme came through very strongly.’

Auron had been to his art exhibition. Why hadn't Henry told him?

‘You’re very quiet, young Jimmy,’ said Henry. ‘I normally struggle to get a word in edgeways when we’re together.’

‘I think our young friend is a little overwhelmed. Perhaps I should get to the reasons why I’m here. I have some news for you, Jimmy, and I felt that it was my responsibility to tell you personally.’

Jimmy suddenly felt the tension in his stomach. What could it be?

‘Spiron is dead.’

Dead! Spiron!

‘He was killed in an unfortunate accident on Chronos,’ continued Auron.

So that's why he was here.

‘My heart is heavy, Jimmy ...’ Auron hesitated and swallowed deeply. ‘My heart is heavy, as Spiron was my brother.’

Brother!

‘He had returned to Chronos and gave himself up. He said that he was tired of living so far away from home and was genuinely sorry for the pain that he had caused you and that he would accept whatever punishment the Council deemed appropriate. He handed his watch over to the Time Council and put himself at their mercy. It was decided to keep him a safe distance away from the Time Chamber, so he was being held in an isolated building in the grounds of Castle Chronmere while the Council considered what they should do.’

‘There was a fire. We’re not sure how it started. The guards fought long and hard to put it out, but alas, to no avail. The building burnt to the ground and Spiron’s charred remains were found in the debris.’

Jimmy was speechless. Spiron was no friend of his but he didn’t want to see him dead.

‘In the early days of the Council, we worked very closely together. We both recognised the heavy responsibility that we shouldered. It was our strong sense of duty that carried us forward. We went about our work with great energy and dedication. But then Spiron started to question our role as the guardians of time. He saw what he considered lesser civilisations profiting from the Universe and he wanted us to have the same opportunities. But it could never be. Chronos, and our time castle, Chronmere, will always remain the same. The centre of time must stay constant. We knew that was how it would be when we took on such an onerous responsibility. There are no tangible rewards for a Time Guardian; it is about the honour of doing the job.

‘But Spiron couldn’t see the dangers in what he was proposing, so he inevitably ended up explaining himself to his colleagues on the Time Council. Of course, they disagreed with him, and it came to a head when they unanimously decided to vote him off the Council, an act for which he never forgave me. He couldn’t face the rejection by his colleagues, so he went into exile with a community on the far side of Chronos. We never heard anything from him. We knew nothing of what he was doing. Then, totally out of the blue, he came back to Castle Chronmere and convinced the Council that he’d realised how wrong he’d been and would we give him another chance.

‘The Guardians are nothing if forgiving, and we agreed to refer him to our Time Support Group. They were to rehabilitate him so that he would be able to work towards full membership of the Council once again. But he betrayed our trust and stole a time watch. It was when he realised the watch was unreliable that he hatched his plan to steal crystals from Henry’s safe. I think you know the rest of the story.’

Jimmy wanted to offer words of comfort, but ...

‘I always hoped that Spiron would come back to us. I wanted to believe that somewhere deep down within him there was still a person of integrity, but I’m afraid that we will never find out. It is a sad end to what could have been a brilliant life.’

Auron picked up his mug and took a mouthful of his tea. Jimmy saw the sadness in his eyes; he felt so sorry for him. Regardless of what Spiron had done, he was still his brother.

Henry reached across and put a comforting hand on Auron’s shoulder. ‘We have all done things which we are not proud of. The time for condemning Spiron has passed. It is now a time for understanding and forgiveness.’

Auron forced a smile. ‘I appreciate your kind words. You of all people, Henry, had good reasons not to forgive him. But, we have to move forwards. Time doesn’t stop for anyone, not even Time Guardians.’ Auron finished his tea and sat in quiet reflection for several moments. And then he surprised Jimmy all over again.

‘I have need of your help, Jimmy First.’

‘My help?’ repeated Jimmy parrot-like. *How could I possibly help the Time Guardians?*

‘Yes, Jimmy First. The Time Council needs your help. Although after your previous experience, I would understand if you chose to decline our request.’

‘I don’t blame the Time Guardians,’ said Jimmy. ‘It was my own curiosity as much as anything else that got me in to trouble.’

‘I thank you for your tolerance and understanding,’ said Auron bowing his head in acknowledgment. ‘One of our roles is to mentor individuals who have been affected by an accidental, or as in your case, unwarranted intervention by a Time Guardian. You are unusual in as much as that you know your mentor, Henry, is a Time Guardian. Our work is normally carried out incognito, as is the case with your friend, Jasmine.’

Jasmine – just hearing her name made Jimmy’s heart leap. A day didn’t pass where he didn’t think about her. Was she OK? Was she the main reason Auron was here?

‘Jonas, one of our most experienced Guardians was chosen as her mentor after you met her in 2150. She had some difficulties acclimatising after you left, Jimmy. She turned away from her art career and her life became a struggle. But with the support of her friends and subtle guidance from Jonas, she was slowly getting things back together. All was well until recently.’

‘Why, what happened?’ asked Jimmy.

‘Jonas went missing.’

‘Missing! How could a Time Guardian go missing?’ Jimmy looked to Henry for an answer.

‘Jonas always made regular trips back to Chronos to update the Council on Jasmine’s progress,’ said Henry. ‘But then they suddenly stopped. I have been to search for him as have other Guardians but he has disappeared without trace.’

‘Has this ever happened before?’ asked Jimmy.

‘No,’ said Auron solemnly.

Jimmy immediately realised the significance of what they were saying. A Time Guardian going missing was serious. Then something occurred to him. He felt uncomfortable asking the question but he asked it anyway. 'Could Spiron have had anything to do with it?'

'Our investigations suggest that he did not. Jonas had no contact with Spiron while he was on Earth. But the most compelling fact that convinced the Council was that he was already in custody when Jonas went missing.'

'I'm sorry for asking, but ...'

'I understand why you would ask,' interrupted Auron, 'but it is very unlikely that Spiron was involved.'

'And what about Jasmine?' asked Jimmy. 'Is she still being mentored?'

'I'm afraid not,' said Auron. 'Jonas's disappearance has preoccupied us. It could take months, even years for another mentor to get close to Jasmine, which is why we need your help, Jimmy.'

Jimmy knew where this was headed. The thought sent a surge of adrenaline through his body.

'I'm asking you to go to 2154 and find your friend Jasmine. We need you to ask her about Jonas. Any small piece of information may help us to find him.'

'Will she know who Jonas is?' asked Jimmy.

'Jonas became her friend. But Jasmine would be unaware that he is a Time-Guardian.'

Jimmy's head span with all of the conflicting thoughts raging through his mind. His previous trip into the future, although it was riddled with danger, had been a life changing experience. But the thought of seeing Jasmine again filled him with a spine tingling anticipation.

‘When do you want me to go?’ he asked.

‘As soon as you’re ready,’ said Auron.

‘I’m assuming you’ll be joining me, Henry?’

Jimmy heard a woman’s voice from behind him.

‘I will be your companion for this trip, Jimmy First.’

Callistra stood in the doorway to Henry’s flat. She looked just as Jimmy remembered her the last time he saw her in Covent Garden; still dressed in T-shirt and combat trousers.

‘I think other skills are required for this journey that Henry Crumble doesn’t possess,’ she smiled.

Auron frowned in disapproval. ‘I need you to maintain a cool head, Callistra. I’ve already told you not to take any unnecessary risks.’

Callistra walked around the bench to where Auron sat, hugged him and then placed an affectionate kiss on his cheek.

‘Auron, there’s no need to worry. You know that I can look after myself. I’m sure Jimmy and I will make a great team.’ She looked at Jimmy, her bright blue eyes sparkling with anticipation. ‘Well I’m ready if you are.’

As much as Jimmy thought of Henry, he was reassured that Callistra was joining him. She was probably more streetwise than Henry and Jimmy knew just how invaluable that would be in 2154 London. He looked at his watch – it was just after nine. He could hear his mates moaning in his head.

‘Don’t worry, young Jimmy,’ smiled Henry. ‘I’ll get you to the Bell Public House in time for your farewell celebration.’

Callistra walked over to the back door and asked Jimmy to join her. She showed him a small grey object that looked like a mobile phone.

‘This is your personal terminal. Your ID is on it and an authentic address in Leighton Buzzard’. She held the terminal in front of his face. ‘I need you to repeat after me: ‘my name is Jimmy First and I live at 23 Mellbrook, Leighton Buzzard, Beds.’

Jimmy did as she asked, and then she handed him the terminal.

‘The terminal now has your voice, retina and electrical profile stored. You will be legitimate this time, Jimmy. It also has a panic facility on it. If you lose me or find yourself in any sort of difficulty, just hold it to your mouth and whisper the word, ‘Chronos’, and you will be transported directly to Castle Chronmere. Any questions?’

‘None that I can think of,’ said Jimmy.

‘The Time Council are extremely grateful to you, Jimmy First,’ said Auron.

‘Please keep close to Callistra and please stay safe. I wish you both well.’

‘Good luck, young Jimmy,’ said Henry. ‘You’ll be home before you know it,’ and patted him reassuringly on his back.

Callistra held her time watch in her right hand, flicked open the cover and looked across to Auron and Henry. ‘I will see you both back on Chronos.’ She wrapped her arms around Jimmy and spoke into the watch. ‘London, September 21st 2154.’

And once again Jimmy disappeared into the dark tunnel.

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For more information and to read the rest of this book please visit:
<http://www.ianoneill.co.uk>